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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003141

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP

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SUBJECT: FIRST REACTION: SHAYKH SABAH APPOINTS NEW CABINET

Classified By: ADCM John G. Moran for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) MFA U/S Ahmed Al-Jarallah shared the names of newly appointed Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah's cabinet with the Ambassador on July 14. U/S Jarallah said the names would be formally announced later the same day. Following is a list of the new cabinet and initial reactions, in no particular order:

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior - Shaykh Nawaf al-Ahmed al-Sabah

A brother of both the Amir and Shaykh Sabah, Shaykh Nawaf has previously served as Minister of Interior and Minister of Defense, both before the Gulf War. While it came as no surprise that former Minister of Interior Mohammed Khaled al-Sabah was replaced, (his relationship with Shaykh Sabah has been decidedly and publically strained) the choice of Shaykh Nawaf to fill his shoes is somewhat disappointing, given that Shaykh Nawaf has a reputation of being a less-than-forceful Minister.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense - Shaykh Jabir al-Mubarak al-Sabah

Although low-key, Minister Jabir proved an important ally in completing U.S. requested preparatory tasks prior to OIF.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Acting Minister of Labor and Social Affairs - Shaykh Dr. Mohammed al-Sabah

The promotion of Dr. Mohammed to Foreign Minister was expected, although he was repeatedly challenged for the post by current Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Shaykh Nasser Mohammed al-Sabah. He has served ably as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs since his return from Washington, and is very close to Shaykh Sabah. The addition of Minister of Labor and Social Affairs to his portfolio may aid us significantly in our efforts to strengthen labor laws and protection for third country workers.

Minister of Health - Dr. Mohammed al-Jarallah

An able technocrat, al-Jarallah worked well with with the U.S. military before and during OIF.

Minister of Information - Mohammed Abulhasan

A career diplomat who has served Kuwait well as its U.N. PermRep, Abulhasan brings to the table a very astute political sense and a keen understanding of U.S. interests. His appointment as Minister of Information may be meant as a signal to Islamists -- who view the Ministries of Information and Education as the high ground in their ideological battle -- that the new government will not be cowed by them.

Minister of Education - Dr. Rasheed al-Hamad

A close relative of Arab Fund Director and former Finance Minister Abdullatif al-Hamad, Rasheed al-Hamad is a former A/S of Education who has spent his entire career working in the field. Although competent, we expect he will have little political clout.

Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water - Shaykh Ahmed Fahad

The appointment of Shaykh Ahmed Fahad to these two key ministries is indicative of his status as a contender for the next generation of Kuwaiti leadership. Further, and more importantly for the USG, it may signal Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed's intention to bring to fruition the long delayed AZN power plant and Northern Oilfields projects.

Minister of Housing - Badr al-Humaidhi

The long-time director of the Kuwait fund, al-Humaidhi is an interesting choice for a Ministry locally known as the "Ministry of Problems," due to large numbers of squabbles and complaints it must adjudicate and respond to.

Ministry of Communications - Shaykh Ahmed Abdullah al-Sabah retains his portfolio.

Minister of Justice - Ahmed Baquer

A chemist by trade and a Salafi MP, Ahmed Baquer retains his post as Minister of Justice, while losing the Ministry of Awqaf.

Minister of Awqaf - Abdullah al-Matooq, whom we are told is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Minister of Finance - Mahmoud al-Nouri

Mahmoud al-Nouri is the Chairman of Global Investment House, a former Chairman of Kuwait Transport Co and brother of former Minister of Education Anwar al-Nouri. Unlike his predecessor, Yousef Ibrahim, al-Nouri is not an economist.

Minister of Trade - Abdullah Taweel

A liberal with a degree in Computer Science, Taweel is a former chairman of the Kuwait Computing Society.

12. (C) The new cabinet has caused no great excitement among those of our contacts who are privy to these appointments. Post will continue to analyze these developments and provide a more in-depth analysis as more information becomes available. Overall, it appears that Shaykh Sabah has chosen a cabinet that will largely maintain the status-quo.

JONES